

## **Drama Vocabulary**

Conventions of the theater:

- audience generally expects to see onstage characters and settings that resemble those of life
- performer and audience agree to be separated from one another (lightened stage, darkened auditorium) – a “fourth wall” exists between the two groups, actors pretend audience does not exist
- performer employs specific techniques (loud and clear speech and exaggerated gestures and facial expressions while facing audience) to ensure communicates clearly with audience
- compressed structure of drama into acts and scenes that often indicate passage of time with interruptions for intermission designed to facilitate viewing by audience
- playwright consciously accepts differing loss of control, responsible for only 1/3 of performance success; directors/actors/technical crew contribute to the perceived “meaning” of the play, responsible for 2/3 of performance success

**stage left (or right)** – left (or right) from the actor’s point of view as she faces the audience (see drawing)

**downstage (or upstage)** – area of stage closest (or farthest) to the audience (see drawing)

**blocking** – director’s organization of the movement on the stage

**proscenium stage** – theater area framed by arch, often fitted with a curtain to separate audience from actors

**thrust stage** – stage that projects into auditorium; encourages direct address of audience

**setting** – scenery, properties, and costumes used in staging a play

**prop** – an article or object used in a play or motion picture (excludes painted scenery and costumes)

**act** – main division in drama often denoting change in location and/or lapse of time

**scene** – smaller unit of division with no abrupt change of location/time and/or new group of actors on stage

**aside** – a dramatic convention by which the actor speaks private thoughts aloud, unnoticed by other actors

**monologue** – long speech delivered by one character which may be heard but not interrupted by others

**soliloquy** – character alone on stage speaking thoughts aloud; generally an introspective analysis or pondering of future course of action

**chorus** – in Greek drama, a group of singers and dancers who represent a societal perspective on events

***deus ex machina*** – “god out of a machine;” any unexpected or improbable device used to solve a problem

**tragedy** – drama of high seriousness that faces evil, depicts suffering, and ends with the hero dead or alive but spiritually crushed

**tragic hero** – protagonist of high position brought from happiness to misery through hamartia

**hamartia** - a tragic flaw, misstep, or mistaken judgment; often causes hero’s failure

**hubris** – excess pride or overconfidence (one form of *hamartia* esp. appealing to Greek poets)

**catharsis** – the act of purging or cleansing after feelings of fear or pity

**comic relief** – humorous episodes in a tragedy, help change the tragic effect

**high comedy** – intellectual comedy evoking ‘thoughtful laughter;’ emphasis on character, thought, dialogue

**farce** – low comedy for laughs, usually emphasizing physical action and broadly humorous situations

## LITERARY DEVICES YOU HOPEFULLY KNOW BY NOW

**plot** – the unified structure of incidents in a story

**narrative structure** – the order in which plot events are recorded

**conflict** – struggle between opposing forces in a story, usually resolved by the end

**exposition / rising action / climax / resolution** – development of that conflict

**protagonist / antagonist** – main character / the force that characters fights against

**dynamic / static characters** – character that does/does not undergo a change in attitude

**round / flat character** – character that is/is not well developed in a story

**foil characters** – pair of characters that parallel each other by contrast

**setting** – the time and place in which a story’s action occurs

**symbolism** – use of an object or action in a story that means more than itself

**dramatic irony** – characters speak without knowledge known to audience/other characters

**theme** – general idea or point of a fictional work

**diction** – selection of words in a work